

Symposium Report

Race, Class, and Nationalism: The Fundamentals of the Caribbean Situation

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The interest by Western academics in decolonization and reparations for colonial occupation is a welcome turn, especially after the considerable amount of work done by postcolonial scholars on these topics in previous decades. If there is any sense that these are well-worn arguments to those in the majority world, it is because scholars and activists like CLR James and Claudia Jones, among many others, did considerable work over decades to document and theorize the atrocities of colonial capitalism.

In July 2022, H-Empire held a symposium to explore topics related to enduring consequences of colonial capitalism in the contemporary Caribbean. The event was organized by Scott Timcke and Shelene Gomes with assistance from Antonia Mungal and Juan Vicente Iborra Mallent. Additional support was provided by CLACSO's Crisis, Respuestas y Alternativas en el Gran Caribe working group and the Lloyd Best Institute of the Caribbean.

The goal of the symposium was to amplify Caribbean-based researchers currently writing on various aspects of colonial capitalism. In their collective expression, the papers helped the audience trace some

of the issues that traverse the contemporary political, economic, and social geography of the Caribbean. The presenters confronted the dynamics of Caribbean societies, both subsumed and conflicted by the legacies of colonialism and challenges of neoliberalism, while also suggesting pathways for resistance and liberation.

Savrina Chinien's paper explored the colonality of power in and through the work of novelist Patrick Chamoiseau. In his reconstruction of narratives of nationhood in Martinique, predominantly reconstructed out of the memory of historical traumas, Chamoiseau's various projects seek to draw attention to Martinique's positionality to France, and by extension to the rest of the world. The colonality of power is reinforced as the metropole mediates the periphery's terms of engagement with almost every other place. Chinien discusses how this primary mediation appears in the other aspects of everyday life in Martinique, like the ego-politics of knowledge, language, and self-comprehension. In effect, the pervasiveness of such colonality constitutes the politics, race, class, and nationality in Martinique.

With a focus on the Garifuna community's struggles against land grabbing in Honduras, Kimberly Palmer's foregrounded the cycle of dispossession resulting from enclave tourism. Without many good options, some Garifuna seek to migrate to the United States, where they encounter the United States border imperialism apparatus and state security officials. Upon apprehension, these Garifuna are deported to Honduras, a territory that is similarly hostile. Palmer's discussion of the participation of deportees in those processes, in addition to promoting the defense of the territory, she suggested are a key aspect in the recovery of cultural traditions, ancestral forms of cultivation, and links with the territory. These same things are being threatened by continuous migratory cycles of young people, who seek in other countries new opportunities in the face of material precariousness and lack of job opportunities in their regions of origin.

Stanley H. Griffin analyzed the legacies of fragmentation from settler colonial society in the Leeward islands, and resistance against it. Griffin expressed willingness to serve the various territories like Antigua and Barbuda, Saint. Kitts and Nevis, Anguilla, and Montserrat while proposing alternative roots to dependency and colonial fragmentation. He argued that a history of informal and formal practices of sub-regional integration at the cultural, social services, and institutional levels illustrate how transnational blocs can overcome the dynamics of fragmentation that are so apparent in the politics of many twenty-first century polities.

In her exploration of the social struggles in Suriname, Kirtie Algoe provided a broad overview of the 2020 elections in that country. Her presentation sought to understand the relationship between

notions of cultural diversity and political struggle. As the political monopoly which presented itself to embody cultural diversity (the National Democratic Party) was challenged by the Progressive Reform Party (formerly Indo-Surinamese presenting, but currently embodying the ideology of a culturally diverse party), intercultural relations in Suriname reached a nuanced juncture. Amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, political scandals and an economic crisis, the role of "e-politics" increased. Within the Surinamese multicultural society, ethnicity had become an important issue in the conformation of political coalitions, and having an important role in political campaigning.

Finally, Shelene Gomes provided some clues to understanding the possibilities of international class struggle and interracial fraternalism through the cross-cultural idea of "betterment" which emerges from her fieldwork with Rastafari communities who embarked on repatriation to Ethiopia from Jamaica and other places. Spiritual returnings from Kingston to Shashamene express another type of Caribbean migratory processes beyond racial labour migrations of workers to metropolitan areas and the construction of other ways of life with a Pan-African cosmopolitan orientation in a multi-ethnic setting. These connections reflected the construction of countercultures of modernity, which have been essential as part of the history of the Caribbean, in which peoples who faced legacies and trauma of colonialism produce new ideas and imaginaries that are central in their social reproduction strategies, creating links and connections beyond those created by slave trade and recent cycles of mass migration.